

# "Mentally Deficient' Patients Not Aided By Shock Treatment

## Children Born With Condition Are Cited; 10 Per Cent, However, Are Caused By Accidents

This is the second of two articles by Ben A. Green, managing editor of The Tuscaloosa News, on Alabama's state hospitals.

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(Written For The Associated Press)

TUSCALOOSA, Ala. —(AP)— The electro-thermal shock treatment, which has shown such marked success in treatment of "mentally ill" persons at the Alabama state hospitals, cannot be used in treatment of the "mentally deficient" patients at the Partlow State School for Feeble-Minded Children, said Dr. William D. Partlow, superintendent of the Alabama State Hospital System.

Many Alabama persons have asked this question since learning of the effectiveness of the shock method.

Partlow State School, the superintendent explained, is a unit operated by the system separate from the adjacent Bryce Hospital at Tuscaloosa. The school is for "mentally deficient" children who do not exceed 21 years of age.

There is no hope that the patient population at the school can be reduced by any type of treatment, he continued. These "mentally deficient" children represent persons who were born with mental deficiencies in 90 per cent of the cases. In the other 10 per cent defects result chiefly from accidental causes.

Partlow State School population is certain to increase just as long as facilities will permit, Dr. Partlow declared. Today the school has a waiting list of 250, and a population of approximately 850. During the last fiscal year, only 18 patients were listed as "discharged" from the school, whereas at Bryce Hospital there were 1,068 discharges during the year, representing more than 20 per cent of the population.

The superintendent distinguished "mentally ill" persons, treated at Bryce, and Searcy Hospital for Negroes at Mount Vernon, as people who at one time possessed normal faculties and who may possibly have these faculties restored in many instances. The mentally deficient child, on the other hand, has never possessed normal faculties.

MINDED CHILDREN, therefore, is confined to education and to handicraft, manual arts, farming and gardening and recreation. Education seeks to develop the child to his highest possible mental level. In the highest class, this level does not exceed third grade in school. Other activities are designed to

make the children as happy and normal as possible, fully realizing that only a very small per cent can ever hope to return to their homes as even harmless members of society.

There is no institution in Alabama for care of feeble-minded Negro children, who present grave problems to many Negro families and communities of the state, Dr. Partlow pointed out.

State support of Partlow State School is based on the same schedule as that which applies to Bryce Hospital and Searcy Hospital, namely a per capita weekly allotment of \$4 per person. This is the statutory limit for the per capita appropriation under prevailing law.

The financial problem of the entire state hospital system, including the Bryce and Searcy Hospitals as well as Partlow State School, has been greatly increased by rising costs in addition to the expensive type of treatment given at the two hospitals, Dr. Partlow's reports show.

In his annual report filed with the trustees last September, and in his semi-annual report given recently, he stressed the fact that the problem of maintaining personnel in the face of attractive offers from private industries and institutions, largely connected with national defense, is increasingly difficult.

Financial support has been a major problem of the institutions for many years. From the period 1919 to 1935, no state appropriation whatever was made available to the hospitals for buildings or equipment. All funds received were derived from per capita allotments, which amounted to \$5 per week for a period prior to 1931. Hospital population during the 26 years from 1919 to 1935 more than doubled. This served to increase the total sums received on a per capita basis, but it was necessary to use much of these funds for expansion of buildings.

OF FARM COLONIES, and cultivation of extensive acreage in vegetables, field crops, fruit and dairy products, the actual cost of feeding patients has been kept at a minimum. Farm produce harvested from hospital properties during the year ending Sept. 30, 1941, were estimated to have a market value of \$195,000.

In 1931, the per capita allotment for the hospitals and school was drastically reduced from \$5 to \$3 a week. The lower figure remained in effect until 1937 when it was increased to \$3.25. A state building appropriation of \$350,000 was also made available at approximately that time. This sum was used to match federal funds on a 55-45 (federal 45) per cent basis, and it made possible several greatly needed building improvements. Additional structures, however, have brought with them additional maintenance costs.

The per capita allotment was increased by Gov. Frank M. Dixon to \$3.50 and later to \$3.75. In April, 1941, the governor advanced the per capita sum to \$4, the statutory maximum. The trustees, in their annual message to the governor last September, urged that the next Legislature restore the former statutory limits (prior to 1931) which set a minimum of \$3.50 and a maximum of \$5.

Authoritative surveys made by national organizations, and cited frequently by the Alabama Citizens Committee (which is devoted to the cause of increasing public interest and state support for the hospitals) have shown that the present \$4 per capita for Alabama state hospitals is far below the average in most states and far below the national average. Some states are shown to average up to \$10 per capital, and higher. Federal institutions are said to average \$3.50 per day in providing the same type of treatment as the state hospitals afford to psychiatric patients.

The citizens committee also points out that whereas the public accepts as necessary a \$5 or \$6 a day charge of a general private hospital for hospital care alone, the state hospitals are provided only \$4 per person per week to meet all costs, including expert medical treatment of difficult cases, wages of personnel, equipment, all supplies of various kinds and even clothing of patients in four-fifths of the cases.

In his annual report to the board of trustees of the hospitals and the board of managers of the Partlow State School, the superintendent recommended efforts to launch a building program designed to meet present the future "crying needs" at all three institutions.

CLUDED six projects estimated to cost \$760,000 at the school, nine projects costing \$1,210,000 at Bryce Hospital and five projects costing \$545,000 at Searcy Hospital.

When outlining this program, Dr. Partlow pointed out that the number of "alcohol and drug addicts" and also "epileptics" in Alabama is steadily increasing, according to hospital admission records. They represent special cases calling for special treatment. It is difficult to handle such cases in the same structures or recreational areas where other patients are treated. The superintendent included in his recommended projects, separate buildings for treatment of addicts and of epileptics.

While striving to keep pace with mental institutions of the nation in progressive methods such as the electro-thermal shock treatment, the Alabama state hospitals are also continuing their "occupational therapy" program, which has attracted nationwide attention in the past.

This program includes farm work and handicraft for both men and women, a colonization plan which has brought great economies and aided treatment, and recreational activities. Recreation ranges from outdoor games and entertainment to indoor parties, movies, special programs, library facilities and other efforts to provide normal outlets for the mental and physical energies of the hospitals' charges.

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## Calhoun Gets Benefits

Calhoun County is getting its full share of benefits from the Alabama State Hospitals for Mental and Nervous Diseases, according to the annual report issued by the Board of Trustees, for only five counties in the entire state sent more patients to the institutions during the last fiscal year than did this county.

The annual report shows that Calhoun County sent 118 white patients and 33 Negroes to the institutions for a total of 151. Jefferson County sent 815 and 423 for a 1,238 total, Mobile 329, Montgomery 279, Tuscaloosa 207 and Walker 163.

In their report, the Trustees paid particularly high tribute to Dr. William Dempsey Partlow, present superintendent of the Hospitals, who has served for a period of 40 years. He was highly commended for the faithful and effective service he has always rendered, not only to those who have been committed to his care, but to his country and state as well.

The report also stressed the need of additional funds for the institution, as follows:

"Particular attention is called to that part of the report concerning the need for increasing the maintenance which is now \$ per capita per week, (the maximum under existing statutes available), while the per capita maintenance up to 1931 was \$5 per capita per week. It is also a matter of record that in many states the per capita allowance for similar institutions in most cases is much in excess of \$5 per capita per week and the majority of states have a per capita allowance of around \$7 and over.

"It is, therefore, the opinion of the Board that the original statutes covering minimum and maximum per capita allowance prior to the Miller administration should be reinstated and perhaps increased to cover the increased cost of maintenance, as explained more in detail in the report of the superintendent."

There is little doubt that increased pressure will be brought to bear upon the new Legislature to increase the allowance for the state institutions, for all of us well realize that we cannot allow our institutions to deteriorate, and that they cannot be operated as cheaply as in depression days. Prices have increased by leaps and bounds, and these increases are, of course, affecting the operation of these institutions just as they do our own households and businesses.

We cannot shirk the responsibility of caring for these patients and we must give

the best care possible. The Legislature will recognize these facts and take proper action to provide additional funds, we feel sure.